


A U B A D E



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A U B A D E

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A U B A D E

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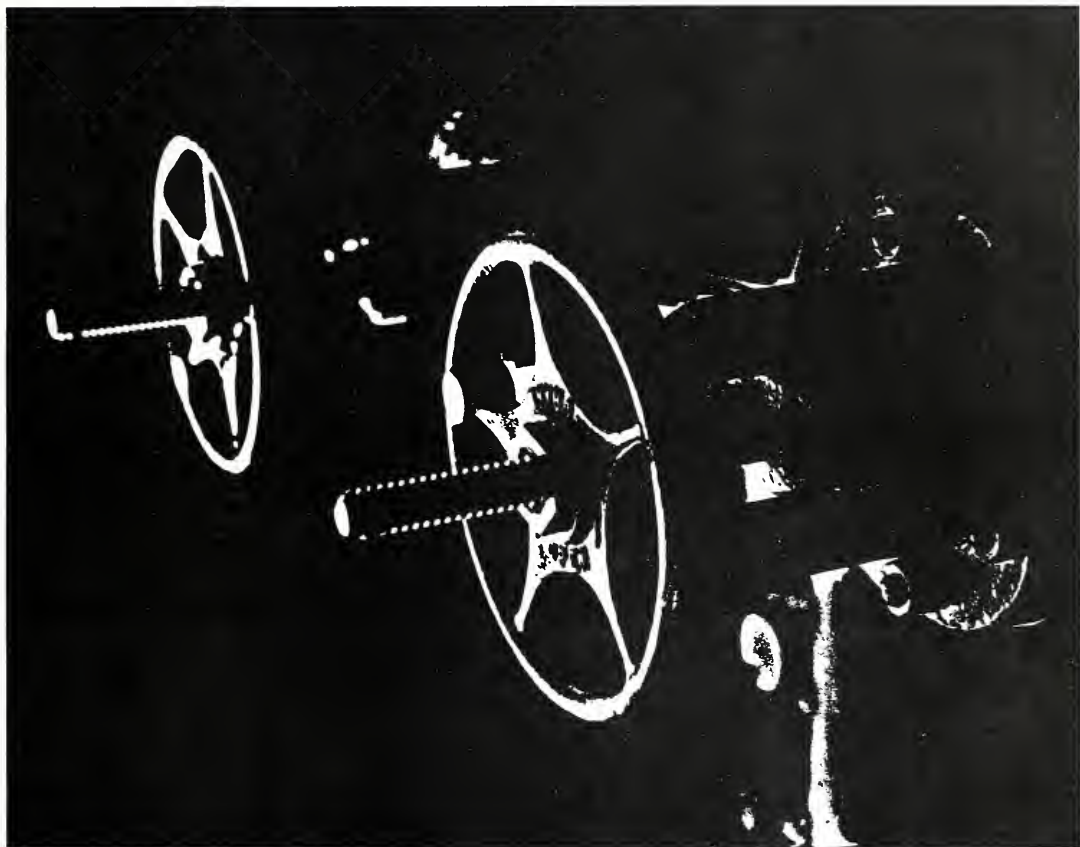
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Aubade Volume XXI

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Heating Plant
Mindy Culver
Photograph

On The Mall II
by Jennifer Dublin

Across from the museums
and the vendors
the people lie out on
the giant rectangular lawn
like walruses or seals
sunning themselves on coastal rocks

while seagulls
the color of yellow-white soap
and pale charcoal ash
glide
wings extended
between granite monuments
and cement buildings
like hang gliders
drifting down and around
in slow-motion spirals
among glinting
color-banded cliffs
cut by ancient
snaking rivers



Apples

by Lissa Brannon

Every year, on this night, the children come.
I twist back the curtains with stiff fingers
and crane my neck to peer down at the walk.
My senses are still sharp;
even though the air is dusky,
even though cars growl in the street,
I can see the children, I can hear them
a long way off.
They swarm out of their houses and meet
on streetcorners, buzzing greedily.

The small ones come first.
I ignore these; they are harmless.
Soft and wet-nosed, little rabbits and
dubious angels. They cling
to their fathers' hands
and cry when they see
the grinning pumpkins.

When the streetlights blink on, suddenly,
like hunger-thinned cyclops snapping open
yellow eyes, I know the older ones will come.
I am prepared.
Next to my chair I have stacked
twelve apples.
The light from my porch
glints off their beautiful taut skins.

Tonight it is beginning to rain,
and the rumble of wheels in the street
will soon slip to a hiss,
but I know a cold drenching won't stop the children.
They are harder than mailmen.
I caress my lovely apples,
tart and firm, the kind
my daughter would have relished.
I narrow my eyes at my reflection in the window,
pull up a smile.
In the harsh yellow light my face is a shadow
and my necklaces and teeth gleam.

I am selective.
I had my bell removed years ago;
I hated its insipid chirp, like
the high pratter of a child.
I prefer them to knock,
perhaps bruise their knuckles.
Most of them I send away unanswered,
chuckling at the poor trudging backs,
the disappointed hands.

I know some of the unchosen see me
in my hard chair between the curtain,
and these are the ones who will return

tonight to make pale mummies of my trees.
Tomorrow I will laugh at such weak
attempts to best me, knowing I have taken
a few of their friends:
future demons who come to me costumed,
too cowardly to show their faces.

Carefully I choose,
and one by one I bestow my gifts.
A tangle-haired witch, a swaggering pirate.
Three who come together in camouflage,
fancying themselves brave soldiers.
My own disguise is less easily penetrated.
They think I am sweet and a bit stupid,
not to know that children prefer candy.
Perhaps they hope I will bake them
cookies one year, a kind old lady with
a ruffled apron and flour on her dried-apple cheek.
One by one I fool them.
Twelve of them I choose to rescue
from the coming days of defiant cars,
of feckless, drunken laughter.

Perhaps I can not save even these twelve.
Perhaps they do not eat my presents,
simply discard them as casually
as they toss the wrappers
of their precious candy
among my flowers.
But it seems to me
there are fewer this year.

When they have all gone,
and the shouts and whoops have faded
behind the rain,
behind the slick sound
of cars on the wet road,
I hold my breath and listen
for that other sound:
the clenching squeal, the round smack
of metal on her sweet yielding skin.

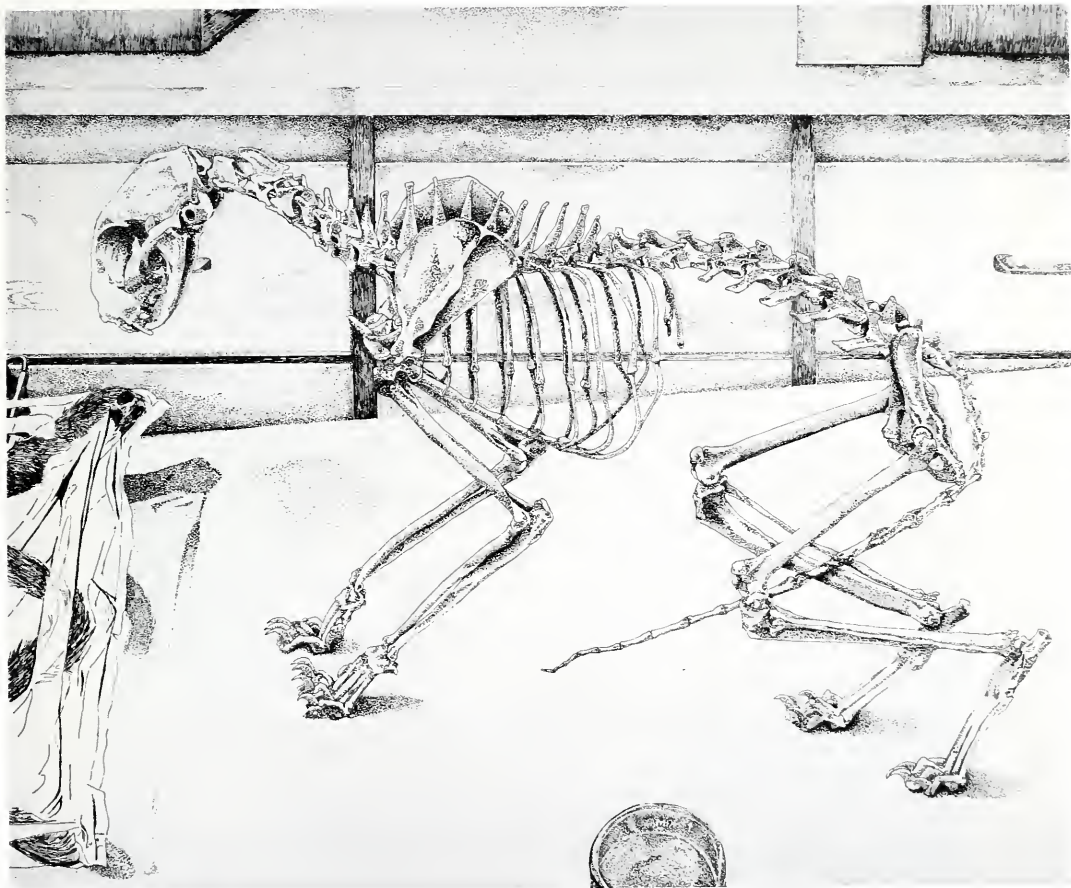
I do not hear it.
The apples of past years
have been potent.
Slowly I turn and as stately as a goddess
I walk through my cold and silent rooms.
The rain beats harder on my roof,
hundreds of tiny hands applauding my victory.



Dianne Bonner
Photograph

Lady of the Night
by Jennifer Dorr

Queen of hearts
alone with a knave
searching for her king.
Higher or lower
red is still blood--
burn the edges with black.
Lost in a crowd
hidden from view
passed around with
little thought.
Blood is red--
there is no love
in every heart.
Black King
Black knave
cut the red woman
down.



"Here Kitty Kitty..."
Cris Geer
Pen and Ink

Delivery

by Genine Lentine

The first room I ever slept in
and the smallest, was yours.
There my heart took shape,
my lungs, hands, and eyes began to work.
I floated, weightless and warm
until vernix slick, I slipped into latex hands
I did not know, into a dry room, bright and cold.
Suspended screaming from my toes,
my diminutive larynx registering horror
at the forceps, the perfunctory snip,
I wondered at the harshness of the silence,
the absence of pounding and rushing.
More hands I did not know placed me on your chest.
You felt different from the outside,
but I made my way back to your heart,
navigating only by the rich resonance of its beat.
I felt your arms surround me, your breath on my head.
I listened and finally slept.

Five before me and one after had lived there too,
though we could do nothing when we learned that
the site where our cells became ourselves
was riddled with malignancy.
You fought to save this chamber and yourself
but found that to live you had to let it go.
Now, a thousand days have passed
since the surgeon cradled its smooth sloping walls
in whitened palms,
and somewhere in the glow of good reports,
something has gone wrong in the statistics.
Your blood, the blood that moves in me
I'm told runs perilously thin.
Your doctors announce this with precision in Latin,
your body in bruised generalizations.

The dread metastasizes from my brain to my gut.
My bones freeze. My joints fuse.
I want to feel some of the pain for you,
and let you sleep, let you get up,
take a deep, full breath and walk out of this room,
but I can't and don't.
Now once more I find myself being delivered
in tears from you, from your warm flesh.
Again I find myself in a cold bright room
tracking your heart.
To howl like the babies three floors down would feel right,
but choose instead the measured sobs of adults
as this won't undo the other patients
in adjacent rectangles of rooms.
Again many hands and voices I do not know
touch my head, rub my back.

Again I lay my wet cheek on your chest
but find it silent.

As the waterways of your blood still,
feel you leave your body, but not mine.
walk out of the room with you, as grateful
for the weeks, days, and hours you have shown me how to die
as for the years in which you have shown me how to live.



Bike
Stacey L. Scott
Oils

by Bryan Higgins

As a child I lay awake at night,
looking up at the grooved and knotted wood
of the ceiling above me,
dimly lit in the starlight
filtering through the window.
I dreamed of walking on those dark boards,
my bare feet gripping the sunbaked timber
of calloused heels and soft leather moccasins.
The boards singing and creaking
as the vast ship swung around
and the sails billowed with a tailwind,
every plank straining towards far-off Caribbean waters.
The ship sliced through the waves
like a wooden cutlass,
the glistening sea-spray beading on the oiled wood
of the deck,
the rush of the sea blending
with the chanting songs of the crew.
But when I awoke
with the silent morning light,
I found myself on the wrong side of the world.
Standing on the carpeted ceiling
and looking upward
at the wooden floor.



Diana Faris
Stoneware



Figure Study
Vittorio Colaizzi
Oil on masonite

The Rescue
by Lisa Williamson

Melanie sat cross-legged in the creek. Cool water washed around her, soaking the flannel nightgown up to her waist. Her fingers ran across smooth pebbles scattered on the creek bottom, grasping several for a closer look. The water chilled her legs numb and covered them with goose-bumps. Soot streaked her gown and body. The stench of smoke lingering in her hair made her queasy. Lifting her right hand from the water, she dragged her fingers through her matted auburn hair. Singed strings came out, tangled between her fingers. She traced the deep welts on her left forearm with her right fingers. Her wounds throbbed at the touch, yet she continued to outline the blisters. She splashed her face with water, wishing her stinging eyes and pounding head would become as numb as the rest of her body.

Melanie's horse was named Cleo, except for show entries and other official times where she used his show name, Total Eclipse. He stood nearly sixteen hands high and his coat was shiny black, free of any markings. She and Cleo spent nearly every day together since his birth six years ago in their foaling stall. All of the ribbons and complimentary tack they won over the years made her proud. Cleo was more than a means of achieving top horse and rider honors; he was her best friend and beloved pet.

She shuddered at the memory of the fire still fresh in her mind. The sun crested above the horizon and the spring mist hung in the air. Melanie could not believe a few hours before her family and neighbors were fighting a fire that threatened their home and eventually destroyed their barn. She heard the mooing as the farm hands let them out into the back pasture as they did every morning after dawn.

Melanie and her parents were sitting at the kitchen table the evening before, sipping hot cocoa. They discussed the day's events and made plans for the following weekend to visit several colleges where she had been accepted. After kissing both her parents goodnight, she dragged her slippered feet down the hallway, moaning in a melodramatic voice about how sore her legs were from the long day of riding and cleaning stalls. The smile drained out of her face upon seeing a bright orange glow from the hall window.

Clutching the window ledge, she pressed her face to the glass, seeing giant flames scorch the outside of the barn behind the house. She sprinted down the hall, yelling for her father. Smoke poured from the barn and she could hear the chickens screeching. At first her screams were only garbled words. She bolted to the back door, pushing it open with the side of her body. Frenzied, she ran into the orange darkness, tripping on the back of her nightgown as she slid down the steps that led to the yard. From the glow of the fire, she could

see the yard ahead as her legs ached with each stride to the barn.

She slid on the wet, warm grass and skidded on her knees. Clawing fists of green clumps and dirt as she pushed herself up, she sprinted the last few yards to the barn. She heard her mother yelling, "Mel...stop. Don't go in," as she ran into the barn, calling Cleo's name. She looked back to see her father holding her mother by the arms, keeping her from going after Melanie. Grabbing the pitchfork, she ignored the burning hot handle and pushed the handing debris out of her way. Thick smoke hung in the air, making Melanie clamp her hand over her mouth and drop the pitchfork. Choking and coughing, she ran by the office, which was engulfed by the flames. Her show ribbons ignited in a row on the wall as the trophy case shattered, shooting glass fragments across the room.

Dodging falling rafters, Melanie ran to Cleo's stall. The iron bars seared her hands when she struggled with the latch. Cleo lunged from side to side, flaring his nostrils. In a frenzied effort to escape, he charged the side of the wooden stall, throwing his full weight against the wall with each drive. Blood gushed from his upper shoulder where the flesh ripped away from the bone.

The latch finally came undone and Melanie slid the door open. Clutching the lead rope from a hook on the wall, she took cautious steps towards Cleo to attach the rope to his halter. He continued to slam against the wall, bellowing, "Easy boy...shhhh...I'm going to get you out of here," she said choking. She grabbed the nylon halter and tried to hook the rope to it. The clasp closed, pinching her finger tightly in the metal. Trying again, she connected the latch and tugged urgently on the rope. The flames burned the edges of the door, spooking Cleo into another rear. "Please...please," she wailed as she pulled the rope over her shoulder and dug her heels into the soft ground. Cleo took several steps forward, then stopped, jerking Melanie into the wall.

Cleo charged forward, pushing her out of the way. Trotting ahead Cleo and Melanie plunged into the hallway thick with the pungent black smoke. Melanie looked up and saw the outline of the door only yards away. As she reached the last portion of the hallway, beams split and crashed, blocking their exit. She let out a wail, turning around only to see the rest of the aisle blocked as well. Outside her mother begged for her to drop the rope and run through the opening, which was big enough for Melanie to slip through. Her palms were raw and bleeding from clenching the rope so tightly.

The fire surrounded them now, and their breathing came in chokes. She cried out in desperation, her body shaking uncontrollably. She looked up at her horse and he nuzzled against her body. More beams fell throughout the barn and the heat tightened her

skin. With the crash of another beam, Cleo broke from her hold and bolted down the aisle toward his stall. Barely able to hear her voice above the roar of the fire, she called after Cleo, repeating his name. Melanie screamed as she slid between the burning beams and staggered out the door as the barn collapsed behind her.

Fire burned along the edges of her nightgown and her father threw his coat around her, putting out the fire with his hands. Sobs threw her body into convulsion and her father rocked her gently, never saying a word. With each sob she moaned Cleo's name until she grew hoarse.

It took the neighbors and the volunteer fire crew several hours to extinguish the fire. Melanie and her parents sat huddled on the grass, facing away from the barn. Later that evening men from the local Animal Shelter arrived to remove from the carcass. When the men approached the family, Melanie's father signalled them towards the barn and away from Melanie.

Melanie stood after everyone but her parents left and walked along the edges of the charred remains of the barn. She shivered as a breeze blew through her nightgown now torn and soaked with perspiration. The cinder blocks and iron bars from the stalls were all that remained. She pushed the bright coals around with her foot. Unable to look any longer, she ran past the house and down the path to the woods at the edge of their property. Slipping on the dew covered leaves, she slid down the hill to the fringes of the creek, reaching

for the small tree branches that lines the path to keep her balance.

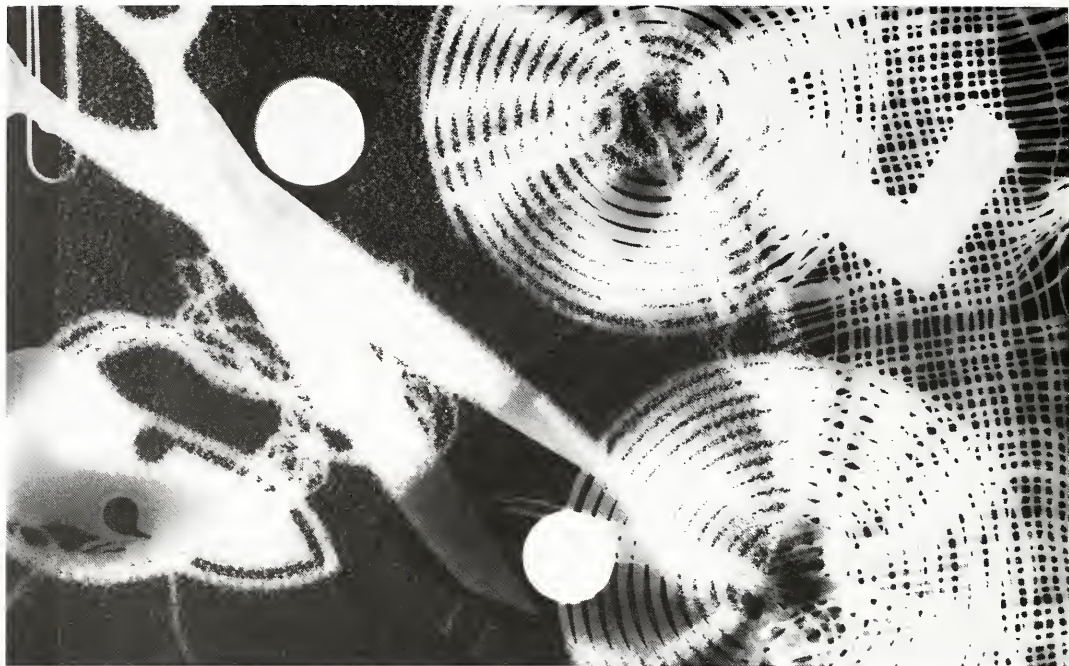
Melanie stepped out of her burned slippers and winced at the blisters and welts covering her feet and ankles. Gathering up her gown, she waded into the water, until she reached the flat rock above the surface. She slid further down into the water where she sat motionless except for an occasional shiver. She pulled her legs up with her hands and rested her chin on her knees.

Her father appeared at the edge of the clearing. He stepped into the creek and crossed through the water until he reached his daughter. He pulled her out of the water onto the rock and embraced her soaked, limp body. They sat in silence, as the water flowed around their feet. Melanie squinted at the sunlight. She could barely see her father, but his soft rhythmic breathing comforted her. His dry flannel shirt smelled musky and felt warm against her chilled cheek. She collapsed against his body and wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him.

The sun burned off the haze and she could hear the other horses galloping in the field after their morning feed. The cows moved further on, annoyed by the spirited horses. Her father relaxed from their embrace, stroking her ragged strands of hair, as tears slid down her puffy face. "Looks like it's gonna be a sunny spring day," he said in a husky voice and squinted at the sun's brightness.



Balsa II
Stacey L. Scott
Balsa wood



Abstraction
Steven Lewis
Photographic collage

At the Bottom of the Deep Blue Sea
by Leslie Upchurch

At the bottom of the deep blue sea
I spied a school of fish having crumpets and tea.

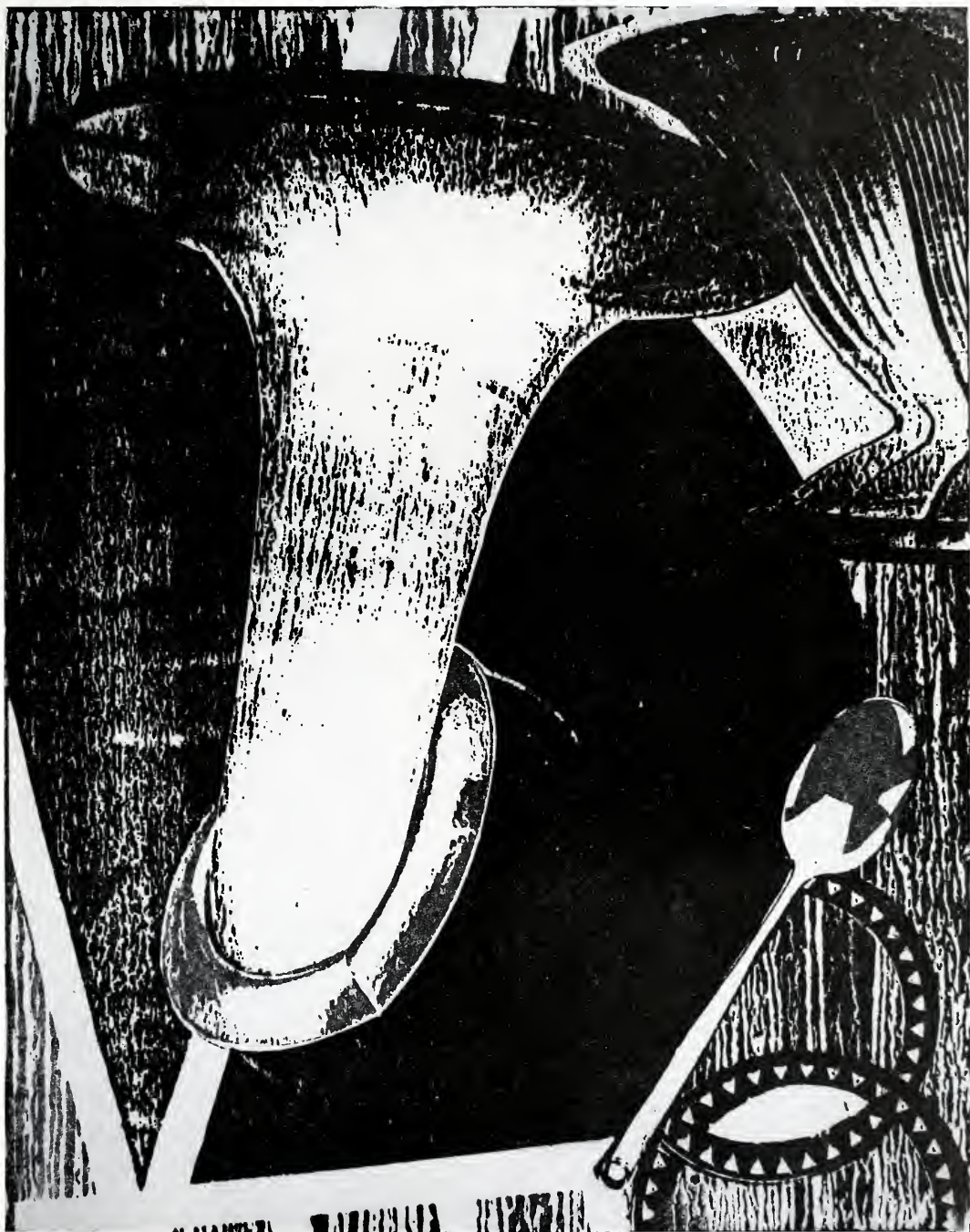
They sipped and nibbled at the sweet delight
Until those huge teeth came into sight.

With a crash and a bang the silver was smushed
The poor crumpets turned into mush.

The fish fled in hopes of escape
But those huge teeth wanted a fish-filled crepe.

Those razor-sharp teeth were stained with blood
The once-dormant floor turned into mud.

At the bottom of the deep blue sea
Wander the souls of fish having crumpets and tea.



Euphoric Euphonium
Mindy Culver
Etching



Earth Collage
Jackie Rueckert
Pen & Ink, Charcoal

Magic Pajamas

by Traci Wood

I sit here
thinking
about the magic pajamas
grandmother would lend me
every time I spent the night.

I spent the night often.
My parents were angry
at things I could
never understand.
Sometimes I thought it was me--
I wanted to be good--
Lying in the dark
of my bedroom,
I would try to cry
just to feel something,
anything
to push away the
cold.

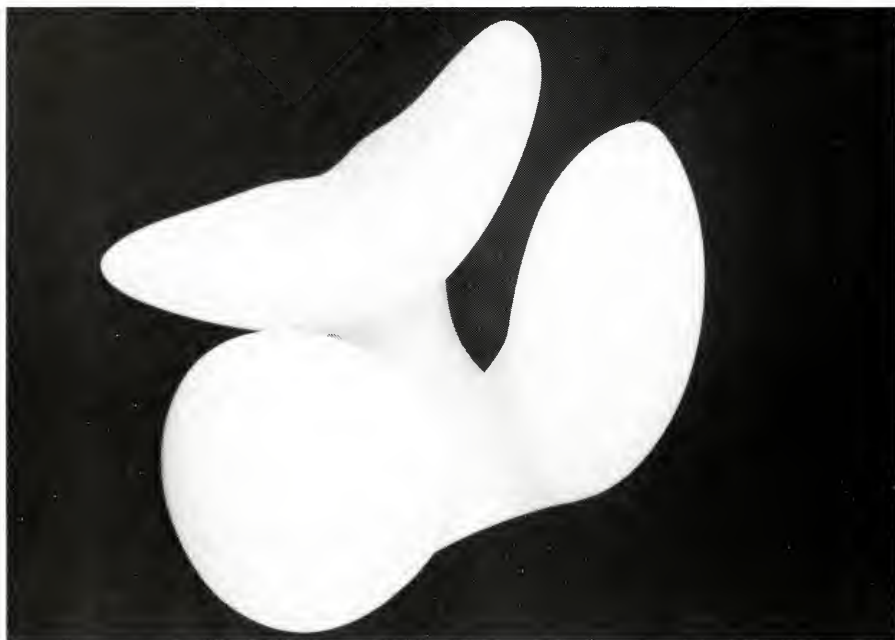
I often stayed
at grandmother's trailer--
Hanging on the wall was
a special mirror,
divided into smaller squares,
each section contained
tiny portions of a world
identical to my own.
A girl lived in there,
my age exactly. . .
with braided hair
and pale, shy eyes.
Only I knew why she cried--
Our faces pressed against the glass,
I dried her silent tears
until she smiled
and threw her magic rainbows
against faded, yellow walls.

In the afternoon
Grandmother gave me coffee
thick with sugar
and cream.
Like conspirators we
would talk about her first husband,
my real grandfather,
who had told her not to let
the door hit her

on the way out.
She told me that she kept
her paperdolls under the bed
so that he wouldn't find them.
They were her greatest treasure,
a secret comfort.

I didn't understand
what she meant;
I only knew that her pajamas
were soft and faded.
They smelled like her:
lavender sweet and
powdery,
with tiny flowers and
small pearl buttons. . .
I would pretend
the pearls were real.
We would sell them,
go away forever,
to a place where just she and I
would be alone--
she would be my real mother.
At night I was safe
in the trailer
with the sounds of cars on the freeway
droning me to sleep
and her arm dangling down
to my palette
on the floor.

Her second husband,
the only grandfather I had
ever known,
was unaware of the secret powers
those pajamas possessed.
Unbuttoning them to touch
the places where my breasts would be,
he didn't realize that I
was not even there,
in the early-morning room
when grandmother
wasn't around,
but far away
in a magic land where
buttons are pearls
and pajamas,
a suit of armour.



Salt Block III
Diana Faris
Salt Block



Trees in the Mist (Harriman State Park VI)

Bryan Higgins
Photograph

Papers

by Sheryl Fowler

I have become a Christmas tree
professors hang small
heavily embellished ornaments
on me
and I have no power to
move them to suit my own design

a string of popcorn theories
rows of bloody cranberry axioms
a chain of essays like multi-colored lights
the occasional tinsel of the guest speaker

I am here to create
not take dictation
spew back half-eaten Christmas cookie facts
dive into ribboned and papered boxes
each with a tiny nugget of pyrite inside
I retreat, an expensive toy
when my boughs are cleared of needles
so the lights don't burn me up
when the ornament hooks
pierce the bark
I have retreated
into a core of heartwood

Waiting for the Salamanders

by Lissa Brannon

Hating it, dreaming of fire
and my warm room with lamplight
pooling on the pages of a book,
I huddle here beside the pond.
I yank my father's old scarf higher,
tuck it around my ears,
swear tomorrow night, if I come,
I'll bring earmuffs.
Soon the sun will slip
behind the mountains
and I'll have to come back tomorrow
or miss them again.
Eight years I've been doing this.
You'd think just once I'd pick the right night.

Tonight ought to be perfect:
clear and cold, no snow, plenty of light.
I wait, hunched on my ankles,
solemn as the burrowing owl
who bobs on his dirt porch
as he watches for dinner.
Over the bright pond
barn swallows swoop and dive into the wind,
slashing the sky with their forked tails.
Behind me the dry yellow grasses
whisper the prairie's secrets:
I strain my ears, hoping to catch word
of when the salamanders will appear.

My father told me about the salamanders
when I was twelve,
on one of our last long rambles
through the bluegrass.
Early March, chilly, with a pale blue sky.

We brushed through the grass,
startling kildeer from their new nests,
and came to the small dark pond
with its thin windowpane of ice.
He broke through the ice
and scooped out a clear ball of jelly,
freckled inside with tiny black dots.
Salamander eggs, he said,
sliding the mass into my cupped hands.

I stood there shivering,
skating my fingertip
across the smooth resilient surface,
while my father told me about the magic night
when the salamanders leave their deep winter homes
and meet at the pond to lay their eggs.

So many times since I've imagined the scene:
the chill of a late winter evening, light fading,

the pond's ice crust melted by early rain.
Dozens of long glistening bodies
crouched low on short legs,
tails whipping like striped pennants,
they meet at the water's edge.

A hushed moment: they gather
and then, on a signal tasted in the air
or felt in the small tremors of the earth,
the males rush for the green water,
dark as wet wood in the dusk,
and race to the bottom
to bury their seed in pockets of mud.
Triumphant, spent, they paddle up
to devour earthworms and crickets
while the females cluster at the first ripples.

They dash down, slick bodies pulsing,
pushing past each other to sink into the mud,
searching for the warm pockets
to fill with eggs.
Up and down, gulping air for new dives,
they streak through the roiling water
and crawl out at last to curl
again in their warm dens.

I picture it, and try every year to catch it.
After three or four nights of the cold
I always give up.

My father left the next summer,
decided his sharp, beautiful lawyer
was more interesting
than salamander stories
and my mother's day care service.

And every year I come here,
on the clear brittle nights
after the first rain,
to hunker between the buffalo chips
and prairie dog holes.
I wait for the salamanders,
knowing one day, one year,
I'll pick the right week.
I'll witness their strange dance
and my father will come home to hear the story.



Jann Kindel
Stoneware

Sunday Afternoons

by Rich Morey
for DEM

The large spike-footed
ones are back again.
You can watch them---
brilliant like autumn leaves---
amend themselves with long,
shiny arms.

Each brings his own pouch
of fake eggs (too perfectly
round to be real)
to beat along their well-groomed earth
in a series of quick, controlled flights;
like a fat, white grasshopper.

They hate the water.
Those who end up here
curse and stomp. Most leave their egg submerged;
always in disgust.
Perhaps they can't swim.

We've watched for many summers now.
Every day they return
renewed in their purpose, as we are
each Spring.
Such rich entertainment
their strange lives have given
Us.

We ducks.



Self Portrait
Diana Faris
Pen & Ink

Easter Baby

by CoryAnne Harrigan

"A Fairfax County sewerage worker yesterday morning found the mutilated remains of a baby as he was cleaning out rags and debris from the machinery of a county pumping plant.

"Wallace Franklin, a maintenance operator. . . , said he was unstopping a mechanical sewage grinder when he came upon the baby's legs.

"It was a bad place to start out Easter. . . . It was a young baby. . . . It had been in the water."

The Washington Post, 4/16/90

The first thing I saw was a foot,
sort of yellow in the green-brown muck.
It had been hidden
behind a sopping rag
that I had tugged and twisted,
trying to loosen it
from the teeth of a herringbone gear.

But I didn't think first
that it was flesh.
A wad of strange plastic, maybe;
some chunk of rubber
that had floated harmlessly
through the lines to the station.

So I poked at it
with my gloved fingertips,
felt it give way to the pressure.
It sat there, swollen with the water
that it had soaked up,
this two-inch glob
with some tiny bulges
at one end--
toes.

And I yelled over to Mike,
"Turn off the grinder, NOW."
So he shut it down, jogging toward me
as I moved away,
him frowning and grunting,
"I'll fix it," while he knocked around
in the machinery.
I went to call the cops
while he bent his knees and
twisted over himself, throwing up.

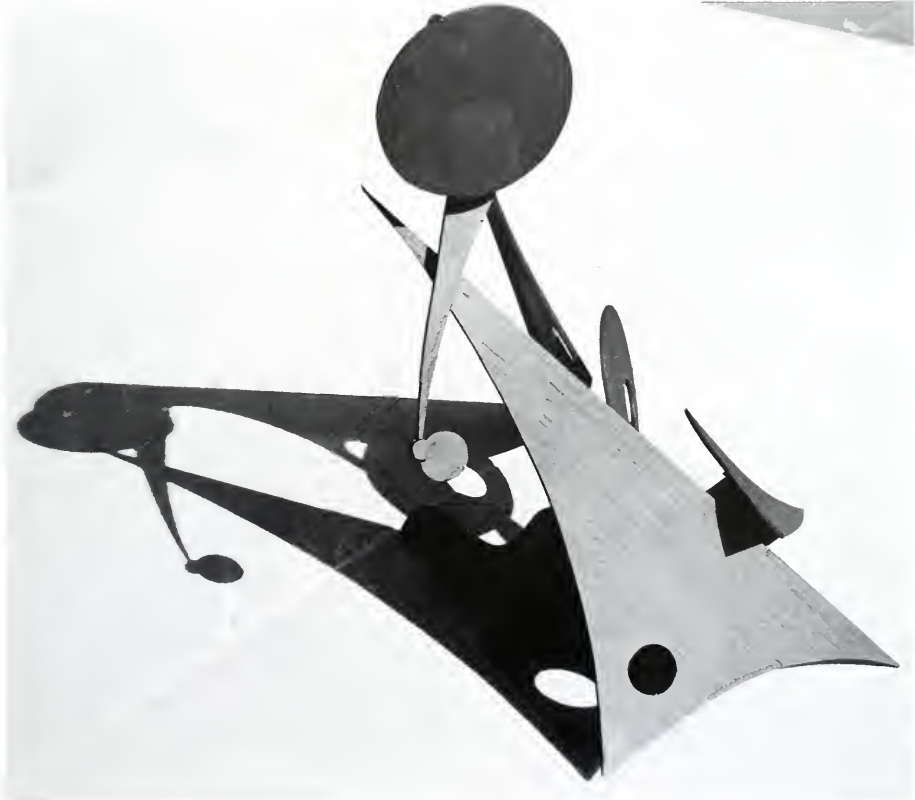
They told us they couldn't tell
how old the baby was.
They didn't even find all its pieces
in the machine. All I could think of
were arms and fingers,
little pink-gone-to-ashen lips
that might float through
to our grinder.
And maybe pieces would swim

to find each other.

The next day we stopped the grinder
three times.

The stuff I dug out was common:
some cloth (maybe pieces of old towels),
a hunk of particleboard,
a mangled old baseball--
trash that gets into manhole pipes.
I think we had all expected to see something.

But on that night, Easter dinner
with my wife was quiet.
She'd heard it on the news
before I even got home.
"Don't tell me. That's all,"
was what she'd slapped on me
when I had gotten home.
And I nodded and looked down
at her bare feet on the kitchen tile.
And I went to wash up for dinner.



Abstract I
Mindy Culver
Balsa



Fallen
Steven Lewis
Photograph

Kolín, Czechoslovakia

by Debora L. Sullivan

In Czechoslovakia a synagogue stands silent.
Nothing faithful echoes off its walls
And only light dances from aged panes
Onto years of settled dust.

Yentl's movie men grabbed the glory of its
Stature for motion picture fame
And left only the prayer books,
No museum has preserved and roped
The sanctuary. It remains as it is--quiet
And open for worship by a people
Who do not exist.

1940. The trains came. June 5. June 9. June 13.
Three loads of Kolín's Jewish people
Were railed to Auschwitz.
The boxcar-packed people of June 13
Never arrived, never returned.

Olga came back--a miracle of faith
And spent her days in unavoidable
Remembrance as she swept the stone
Memorial of her people's names.

Synagogues--Fredericksburg, London--
Hold the Torah scrolls of Kolín.
They adopted Olga who grew deaf with age,
And secretly sent a hearing aid
Past communist borders.
Olga's world was reopened to sound,
But her heart could not sustain her in her
Renewed vitality. Olga's death left
Kolín spotless of all remembrance.

The candles of her community must be lit
In synagogues who know little of the
Silence that settles in the gilded sanctuary.
It is devoid of everything
But the living word of written prayers
That were said silently
Or aloud on a train to Auschwitz.

A Twilight Game

by Jeffrey S. Bardzell

wind scrapes snow off this landscape
its desolate snow and late grey sky
see your mate fly o hawk by scudded clouds
i take the blame for her startled flight
but i must make my lake tonight

frost bite freezes into my cheeks
my eyes strain against the light and my brow draws downward
the day grows old and my knees ache from hauling this body
in a crooked line through the swollen swirling snow
and i must make my lake tonight

i clench in my pain and make the woods
and hear the rushing trill of the loon
there she is floating in a patch of water
she sees me and dives beneath the ice
resurfaces and meets me in the red of her eye

she trills her fey signature
and i lie on my stomach scrambling with my straps
while a flurry of snow slips lightly down my back
i set my gun straight at her lense on that red eye
i cock the weapon aim and gently freeze in my place

i click the button and lock her in my camera's mind
cock click cock click cock click cock click
then in my cabin by the shore i drop my pack and
light a fire and put in a new role of film
i lie in wait for tomorrow's trillish cry across the lake



Figure Study
Vittorio Colaizzi
Oil on masonite

1991 Chandler Prize for Poetry

Hypothermia

by Deborah L. Sullivan

The night air chilled our campsite
So that the campers shivered quietly
In their nylon-and-polyester-filled cocoons.
The North River kept up its eddies
And the cicadas sang in rhythmized chorus.

My cot squeaked with the weight of my
Wrestling as the soft cackle of
The camp radio lulled me to sleep.
But I could not rest, for my shift was not over.
And our plans for the hike marched through my mind.

With the sleeping bag zipped up to my chin
I felt like the Gypsy Moth caterpillar that we
Pointed out to the girls today--and told them not to kill.
Yet tonight when the girls in tent three screamed
About a beet-red millipede, I took no haste
In saving it from a broom beating.
It disgusted me too.

Yesterday, when the sun was high and warm
On our swimsuit strapped backs and the lake
Waves lapped against our metal canoe,
Our conversation turned to God and
The mingling of the soul in a sea of spirits
After death. You in the bow and I in the stern
Paddled in sync as we talked.

Tonight you left
For a midnight bridge conversation
With your lover who loves men too.
The mountain weather was fickle and turned
Your lips blue as you argued about love.
When you came back and opened the canvas tent flap
Without a flashlight, I held open my warmth
To you in silence, for you could have died cold.

I held you and rubbed life into your colorless skin.
Reassured only by your heartbeat against my chest,
I cupped your body into the curves of my flanneled torso
And prayed that you would know the honesty of my loving
Woman to Woman.



Salt Block II
Diana Faris
Salt Block

Melcher's Prize for Two-Dimensional Art



Steel Tits
Mindy Culver
Photography

1991 Chandler Prize for Fiction
The Strange Town
by Scott Peterson

"He was from out a town, a course. Anyone from town would've known that if you saw Reverend Curry crossing the street on a Sunday, you'd best look around for the twins. Anyone'd know that. He was from out a town, so he didn't know," the old man said. We were sitting on the front porch of his store. Not really doing much, just sitting, drinking lemonade, shooting the breeze.

"Anyhow, kinda shook the town up, you know? A lot. Nothing like that ever happened in Tariffville before. I mean, sure people die. Hell, it's a part a life. Someone like Mrs. Mackey gets up there in age and she kicks. Natural. But this, this was. . . something else. Just wasn't right, you know?"

"No young ones ever--" I started.

"Oh, sure," he said. "Timmy and Teddy Henderson weren't but 21 and 22 when they went off to Korea. Teddy made it back. Can't say the same for Don Beldon. 18 years old, and gets sent off somewhere he can't even place on a map. Crying shame. The way his momma carried on. . . and his pa, his pa just kinda looked. . . broken. Well now, life'll do that to you," he said philosophically, taking a pull of lemonade. "Damn but that's good. Ain't that good? Don't Betty make the best damn homemade lemonade you ever had?"

I assured him she did. I neglected to mention that as far as I knew, it was also the *only* homemade lemonade I'd ever had.

We sat there for a while just watching a car go by now and then. Most of them either waved or honked. No, they tooted their horns. Strange, but I don't believe I've ever heard a horn tooted in New York. I'm not sure I realized there was a difference. There is.

"So the twins. . ."

"Missy and Mary," he said. "Her momma always wanted a pair of girls named Missy and Mary. Not that she planned to have them together, Lord no," he said chuckling. The chuckling turned into a cough. He turned and spat what sounded like a piece of his lung off the porch. You could tell it was a familiar gesture.

He took out a handkerchief and wiped his mouth. "So. Prettiest little pair you ever did see. Not like the Hurleys there," he said pointing at a couple of young teenagers walking into the hardware store. "Ain't that a homely bunch a boys?" he said smiling, but not unkindly. I had to admit they were pretty

ugly. "You should see their pa. Makes them look like goddamn movie stars. Robert Redford and Paul Newman, or something. Lord, but that's a ugly man. Worthless, too."

I took another look when they came back outside. Their father had to be pretty repulsive indeed to make them look like movie stars. Maybe Dustin Hoffman and Sean Penn. Or Lassie and Benji.

"Maybe they'll turn out better'n their pa. I don't know. Hope so. Pure waste a life, I tell you," he mumbled.

"Seems like you know just about everyone in town," I commented, glancing sideways at him. He smiled.

"Boy, if you *don't* know everyone in town, it's a mite suspicious. In case you haven't noticed, Tariffville ain't all that big."

"So, it's sort of like one big family, I guess," I remarked. "Everyone knows everything."

"I suppose so," he said. He looked at me. "But I think you might got a bit a the wrong idea there. It's not like all we do is sit around all day and talk about people. Yeah, sure we know what's going on with each other. But it don't really bother no one none. Least, not much. If it did, I reckon they'd move. You know, I do believe you were kidding when you mentioned the family bit, but that's sort a what it's like," he said, sipping his lemonade.

"One big happy family," I said casually, looking into my glass.

"Now, I didn't exactly say that. Big, yes. Small for a town, big for a family. Happy, though, well now, I guess that's open for discussion. Some that don't particularly like each other all that well. Hell, couple that damn near hate each other. But that ain't all that unusual either. My wife's got two uncles that almost shot each other. On purpose. Twice. Now, I don't know about you, but that don't exactly sound like a big happy family to me. But hey, her and her sisters are about as close as you can get," he said. He shifted in his seat a little. "You take the Brocklemans. Probably the most private family in town. Keeps to themselves most a the time. Tough to find out any good dirt on them, boy, let me tell you," he said, winking at me. "Just kidding, a course." He sobered up a bit. "But you never seen a family half so caring as when they came through for the Currys. Sure, they're neighbors, but considering all they done, that don't really explain half a it."

"So what does, you think?" I asked.

"You really want to know?" he countered. I nodded slowly. "Where you from again, son?" he inquired.

"A few different places," I said. "New York, mostly, I suppose. Lived for a while in Boston. About two years, I guess."

"What did you do in Boston?"

Starting to feel the tiniest bit uncomfortable, I said, "I went to school there for a while."

"For about two years?"

I uncrossed my legs and finished my lemonade. "For about a year and a half or so." I put my glass down and spat over the railing, getting my chin a little wet. I crossed my legs the other way, and picked up my glass again. I looked at it for a while but didn't see anything I hadn't seen before. I turned it around and around in my hand. Put it down. Picked it up. Turned it around some more.

Smiling faintly, he finished his lemonade too. He put it down and spit over the railing successfully. He asked, "So why'd you stop going to school?"

Staring at the paint on the railing I said, "They. . . asked me not to come back."

With the same faint smile he asked, "What'd you do, get in a fight?"

I laughed softly. I hadn't been in a fight since Anthony Crispino had tried to steal my Twinkies. That was in sixth grade.

"No, nothing like that. My. . . I had some problems in a few of my classes. I wasn't able to. . . keep up with the work. That's all. No big deal."

He was still looking at me, and I was still looking at the railing, caressing the glass. "Don't seem much like a dummy to me. What was the problem?"

"Uh, a uh. . . a family. . . matter. My little--" I started, when his wife walked out. She smiled at me.

"Saw you playing with that glass and figured that meant you must want some more but were too shy to ask," she said and grabbed my glass and his. She disappeared inside and was back in a second with more. "Now, you want any more, you just ask, you hear?" she instructed. I nodded dumbly. "Can I get you anything to eat?" she asked.

I shook my head. "No, thank you. Thank you very much, though."

She beamed. "Well now, honey, that's quite all right. It's my pleasure. If you want anything, you're going to ask, right?"

It was a rhetorical question. I had the feeling that if I wanted something and didn't request it, and she found out, I would no longer be in Betty's good graces. For some reason this mattered to me. Very much. I assured her she would be privy to my every wish. She glowed and nodded smugly, then cheerfully turned and went back in the store. I smiled into my drink. He caught it.

"Damned if she don't make you feel pretty good, don't she?" he asked. I nodded.

"I remember how she acted when she heard about Missy and Mary. I thought she was gonna cry her eyes out. Didn't though. I remember watching her. She answered the phone. We were in the kitchen. I was just finishing up breakfast and she was getting ready to go to church. So she's standing there on the phone and I realize she's not saying anything. So I turn to look at her and she looks at me with her eyes so wide. . . I thought they'd fall out for sure. Without saying a word she hangs up the phone and walks over to me. I stood up, a course, and she grabs me in this bearhug and buries her face in my shoulder. She said one sentence. 'Missy and Mary got run over and killed by a truck.' Course she had her face in my shirt, so I didn't understand at first. Or maybe it was just such a unexpected thing that I couldn't believe it. I don't know. Don't matter."

"Betty kept saying, 'It's God's will, it's God's will.' Hell. But what was He thinking? I sure don't know."

"So anyway, we stand there like that for about a minute or so, then Betty stands up straight, wipes her face with her hands and says, 'Well.' That's all, just 'well.' Well. She gets on the phone and starts calling people, asking them to bake stuff and bring it over to the Currys, stuff like that. You know, the kinda thing you do when something like that happens."

I snorted.

"Yeah, I know. Kinda pointless. It's like, how many pies could they eat, right? But then again, case like this, you got a lotta people hanging around your place, and they get hungry. Plus, you know, I think it makes everyone feel better for being able to *do* something, and a course it makes the family feel better to know that someone cares. Or a lot a someones. And let me tell you, a whole lot a someones needed to feel better. The town, the entire town, was just. . . I don't know. . . devastated." He looked away.

"So, pretty much everyone baked something?" I asked, a bit skeptically.

"Lord, no. There's plenty a people, like the Hurleys or the Walters that wouldn't know a oven from a hole in the ground. But still, they did what they could. Hell, old Paulie Walters even stayed sober long enough to show

up at the funeral. Even went to the house afterwards. Smelled like he took a bath, too. Believe me, boy, that in itself's a minor miracle. Lemme tell you, on a windy day, you best not be standing downwind a old Paulie. Man's a lethal weapon if you get within about five feet a him. But let's see now, where was I? Oh, yeah. In his own way, I think Paulie did a whole bunch. And it meant something to the Currys too. Really did."

I smiled weakly. "So, hold on a second, you're telling me that the whole town got all shaken up by these two little girls getting killed?" I shook my head a little.

He turned to me and demanded, "Boy, ain't you been listening to me at all? Have I just been talking to myself the whole damn time?"

I was taken aback, and a little frightened, to be honest. "No, it's just that... well, I'm sorry, I'm not from around here. I don't know what it's like. I didn't know some people were so... entangled in each other. I just... found it a bit... weird. I'm sorry," I finished lamely.

He glared at me a moment longer, then closed his eyes and gave a little sighing laugh. "S'all right. I might've been a bit quick on the jump there. It's just that, well, this is kinda a touchy subject, in case you haven't noticed," he said. He chuckled. "Weird, huh? Think we're weird? Why, cause we tend to care about other people? I mean, think about it. Two little girls, only about eight years old, get run over and killed and you think it's weird that we get upset over it? Son, what kinda place do you come from?" he asked incredulously.

I smiled sadly and shook my head. "You wouldn't believe it. I mean, if I think *this* place is weird, you... well, it's like, I know people that when someone in their family dies, they barely... I mean, it's... like another planet," I ended.

He chuckled. "I guess so."

We sat there for a while, just lost in our thoughts, thinking about children dead before their time. Finally, I came out of my reverie and asked what I'd wanted to ask for some time. "Sssso... who did it?"

He looked at me and blinked. "Who did what?" he asked eventually.

I looked around at the other stores. "Who was the driver?" I inquired softly.

He pressed his lips together, and rubbed his chin with his left hand. "Oh. Well, like I said, he was from out of town."

I must have squirmed a little, because he said, "No, no, not like you. Not like you at all. He was more a small-town boy like me. He was from Moorestown, just down the road away. About 40 miles, I guess. Far away enough that he didn't really know about the Reverend. But I had been through all that, now haven't I?" I nodded once. "Let's see now. The driver, right? Yeah, he was just in town visiting some friends a his. Or maybe they were cousins. Don't matter. Anyway, he was just vis-

iting. I think he was on his way back home actually."

"And you know what the really sad thing is? Well, I think so, anyway. It wasn't even his fault. I mean, he didn't break any laws. He wasn't speeding. He didn't run a stop sign. He wasn't drunk. Nothing. Just cruising along at about 35 miles an hour on his way out a town."

"I thought the speed limit was 20 around here," I interrupted.

"It is now," he said, looking sideways at me. It took him a moment to get back on track.

"Didn't even break the law. Betty thought it was better that he wasn't drunk. I don't know, I kinda felt like if he was drunk, at least it'd give you something to get mad about, you know? Something that would almost make some kinda sense a the whole damn thing. You could at least blame the *guy*. But this way, you got all that anger, and no place to throw it. Except maybe at God, and I ain't too sure about that. Don't think that's what I want to do. Betty kept saying, 'It's God's will, it's God's will.' Hell. What was He thinking? I sure don't know. But anyway.

"So I suppose *technically* it was the girls' fault. Except it wasn't, you know? Oh sure, going by the letter a the law it was, but all their life they'd just followed their daddy. They knew if they just stuck close to their daddy, they'd be safe. I mean, that's what a daddy's for, right? Keep you safe and protect you and all that good stuff. And everybody knew they would stick close to him, that is, so what could've ever happened? Right?" He said the last word bitterly.

He ran his hand through his hair. "You know what, son? You know what the problem with a town like this is? Sometimes it just plain forgets that there's any place else. Well, not really, cause you got friends in other places, and relatives, and people move away and all, but *still*. Sometimes we just forget. We get to thinking that it's just us and our family and our friends and that's all there is. And then the world comes crashing in, and it's like we don't know what hit us."

He sat there for a while with his eyes closed. Betty came out and refilled our glasses without a word, but I wasn't thirsty anymore. After a while I started to wonder if he'd fallen asleep. He must have been pushing seventy. Not ancient or anything, but no spring chicken, either. I stood up. He didn't open his eyes. I left the porch as quietly as I could. He didn't stir.

I walked across the street to the gas station. I paid for the oil change and gas, tipped the guy and got in my car, one of those little Miata jobs. I sat there for a second, then reached over and opened the glove compartment. I must have looked at the photograph for a long time, because the attendant came over to ask if anything was wrong. I shook my head, started the car, and drove off. I was very careful. I went fifteen miles per hour until the strange town was well behind me.

The Interrupted Summer
by Jennifer Dublin

That summer
like all the times before,
I wanted white sandcastles
and polished seashells,
and I wanted to see the
bright colored kites fly
under a blue sky
like dragonflies.

That summer
like all the times before,
we should have been
in the Mexican restaurant
with the arches
and the pink roof:

Where the taco salad was a fort,
the black olives foot soldiers,
the melted cheese boiling oil--
a solid defense sliding down
the slope of ground beef.

But that summer
you were doubled over
on the edge of the bed.

Before the ambulance arrived
I asked you what T-shirt
I should wear, but you
left me alone
with my own choice.

Outside in the dark summer night,
the black strap held you on
so you wouldn't fall off the stretcher.

I looked at you, and
watched your mouth
move in slow motion
like a fish's mouth
underwater,
so I know you spoke.

And for years I've tried
to remember what you've said.

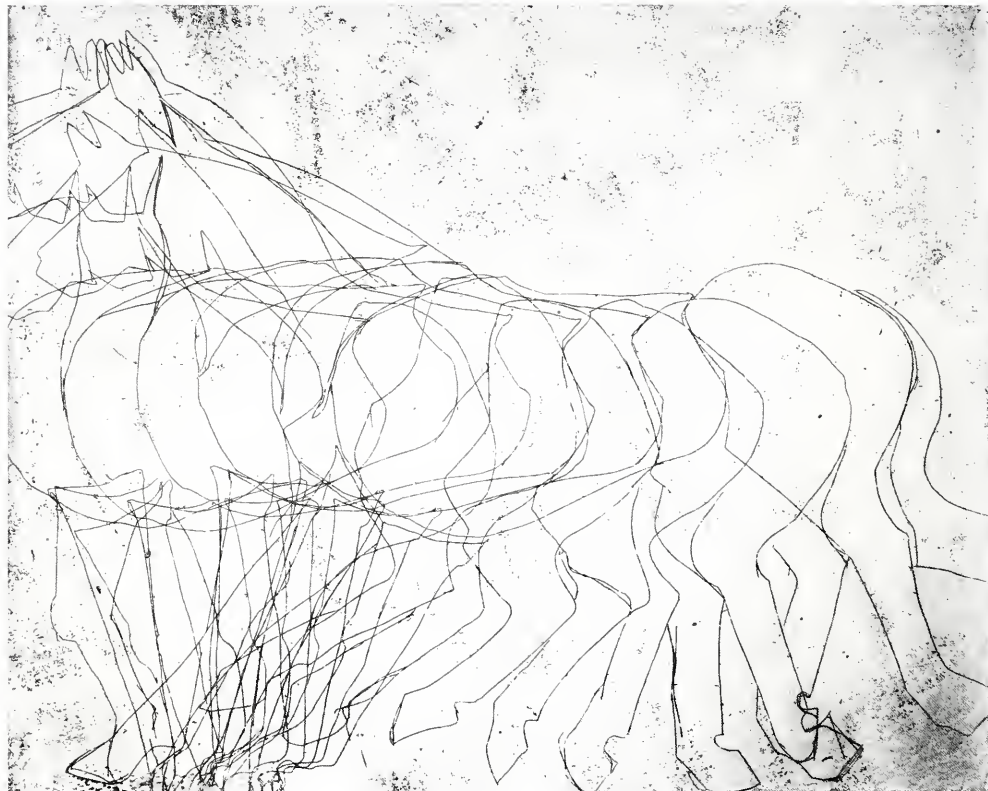
I wish I could
scoop the dirt
off your grave
and retrieve you
as I used to scrape off
the congealed cheese to
get to the refried beans.

Yes.
This summer,

This summer
I would surrender
my moat of guacamole
and let you pour
hot melted cheese over
my tortilla chips and tomatoes,
the fiercest of all my warriors.



Untitled
Greg Davis
Smoked ware



Motion
Stacey L. Scott
Etching

Linda's Beauty Shop
by Traci Wood
(for Mawmaw)

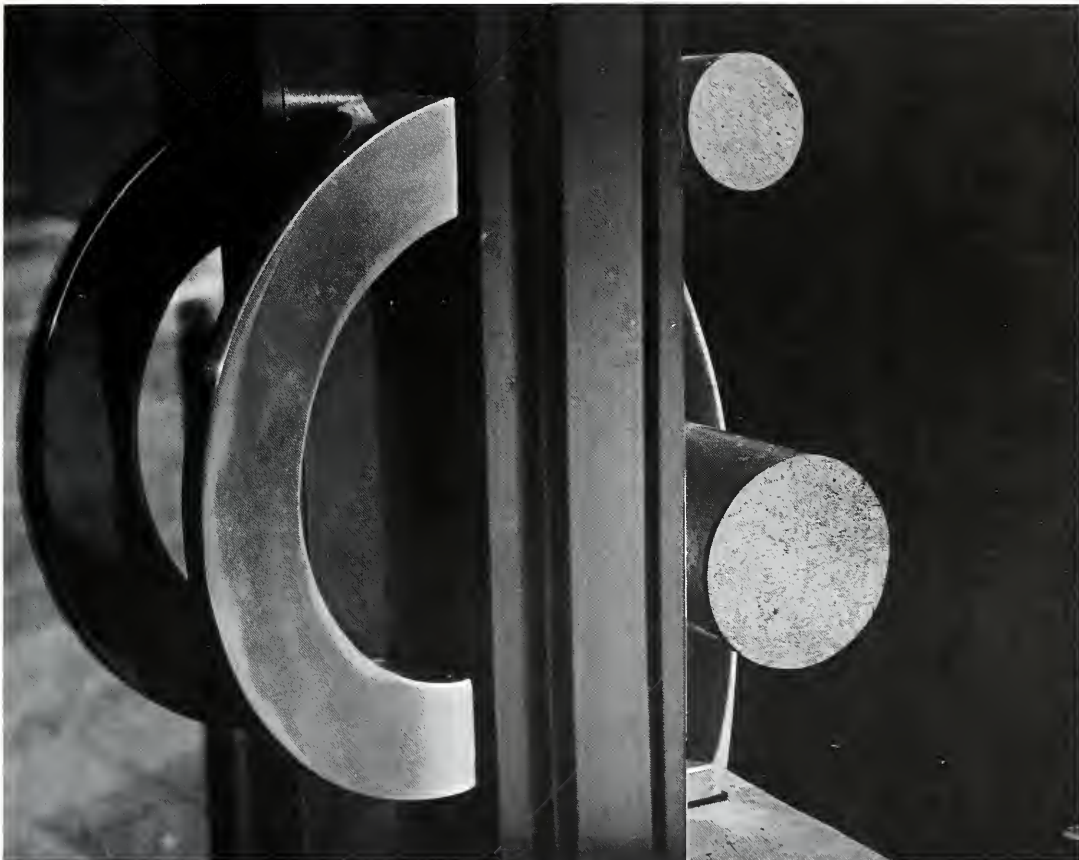
Sitting there behind my eyes,
your hair flashes black,
shiny raven
concealing sparrow brown.
You were young then.

Linda would give us coffee,
thick and hazy, to sip--
our knees balancing cake
on peach napkins.

The click-click
of sharp scissors
and tongues
intrigued the child,
her feet swinging in time
to Johnny Cash on the radio.

Waiting in Linda's basement,
I watched the pictures curl
against the paneled wall.
Women with hair piled high
smiled,
like it was Christmas every day.

Even then I knew
you weren't like them,
smoking menthol cigarettes
with lips pressed
like flowers, fading in a book.



"Handle" With Care
Mindy Culver
Diptych Photograph

Letter to the Sisters of Loretto

Lissa Brannon

I am sorry; I had almost forgotten you.

I think of the college often;
the red tower on Denver's highest hill,
cool and serene behind the old trees
and the moat of rich grass;

the windy rush of two years,
smells: cut lime, new books, smoke;
bits of independence like sweet candies
wrapped each in a razor-edged paper;

the last shocked, angry weeks
of impossible memos from the president's plush chair,
the fat unblinking board members in a row like eggs in a carton,
our proud sit-ins--the sixties relived, we said,
the deep sob of the towerbell reaching us in the parking lot
where we hugged goodbye between boxes of clothes and books;

but I'm afraid I hardly ever think of you.
Perhaps it's because I'm not Catholic,
and you seemed to me the strange and
wrinkled relics of some unfathomable past.
Sweet, yes, and comforting
with your calm confidence in our honor,
leaving us alone with a test and a promise
that you'd be praying for us in your office.
It's been two years, though,
since I remembered that.
My world spins more quickly than yours.

But today
a black and white
article on "the death
of the private institution"
called you to mind.

And I remember now
how you stood like the posts of a fence,
smiled gently as we filed past, defeated,
when the trustees shook hands over the deal.
I remember your faces, drawn and sweet.
I remember the crosses resting in the hollows
of your thin necks.

Sister Antoinette,
Sister Dorothy Jane,
Sister Damien,
at sixty, the youngest of your order.

A friend told me one of you is still living
in a tiny apartment,
a dingy building, home of roaches and drug dealers,
across the street from the college.

I wonder, do you sometimes cross over
to haunt the empty halls,
kneel painfully to touch the white and gold tiles
set lovingly into place one by one
by the hands of your sister
a hundred years ago?
Do you brush your fingers
against the cool, dusty blocks of sandstone
hauled by your sister from Manitou Springs
a hundred miles away?

Do you feel yourself fading,
thin and silver,
a last strand of spiderweb
concealed by the mists that rise from the grass?



After the Storm
Steven Lewis
Photograph

A Walk through an Asian Market

Joel Clark

Curiously strolling down a center aisle,
my mother's presence near.
Old people with twisted knuckles
and loose wrinkled faces watch me,
they make me uncomfortable,
I am a child.
Gawking wide-eyed at the head of an ox on the floor before me,
I step around it
and then look behind,
but it held no surprise
for I was already used to such sights.
Crates of big, squirming brown frogs,
singly grabbed from their wicker prisons,
their legs hacked off so to be more manageable.
My eyes kept staring,
next table.
Soft shelled turtles
fresh from the harbors
CLEAVED into two equally living parts,
the eyes on the anterior soma
wide-eyed as ever,
struggling.
Why don't turtles die when you chop them in half?
Boiling pits of chickens,
squawks,
feathers on the floor,
smells of organica
stale the air.
People squatting and bartering
in dull, seamless clothes,
bare feet.
Strings of pork hang with drying snakes,
drying fish.
My mind then turned
to the layered rice fields of
Lantao Island.



Viking
Mindy Culver
Balsa wood

Going In Circles

by Jessica L. MacKenzie

I really wish that someone had warned me that yesterday was going to be a pretty bad day, and that I should just stay in bed. See, I usually manage to get myself into some kind of trouble during the day, but I am used to it now. It most always has something to do with the fact that I have a tendency to tell people things that I really shouldn't tell them. But, I always seem to get out of it. Well, until yesterday.

I have been kind of seeing this guy named Brandon on and off for the past couple of years. I say "kind of seeing" because it is a weird relationship. We have known each other since the third grade; I met him at my best friend Vivien's house. He lived down the street and used to come over and swim with us sometimes. I knew the minute that he tried to drown me in the deep end of the pool that we were destined to have a great relationship. We were fighting over those rings you toss into the pool; they sink, and whoever gets the most wins. Well, there was something about the green one, maybe it had more points or something like that. Anyway, there we were fighting underwater over a damned game and neither one of us was about to let go. I finally yanked it out of his hands and started swimming for the top; I thought my head was going to explode from lack of oxygen. But good old Brandon grabbed my ankles and held me a mere half-inch from victory (and air), and that's the way it's been ever since.

Things basically haven't changed a bit since third grade. I have always liked Brandon a lot, and I haven't figured out why yet. I know that sounds pretty dumb, but after everything that he has done to me I should never talk to him again. Like two Christmas breaks ago when we were both home on vacation, and he asked me to go into the city with him. Well, he called me that day and told me that he would meet me at the train station in the city, because he was already there. I said fine, like a complete idiot, and when he finally got there he was stoned and he had his best friend Craig with him. Craig and I hate each other, and it ended up being me tagging along on boys' night out. All we did was walk around all night and look for some bar where they thought they could get served. And to make things worse, I found out this summer that they had the whole thing planned out beforehand. Sure, I was pretty mad when I found out about it, but I always end up forgiving him.

For the past year or so the big tension is that he has another girlfriend, which is fine with me because Brandon and I only see each other when it is convenient. The problem is, is that he forgot to tell me about Megan. One day I was at my friend Rhiannon's house baking cookies for Brandon, and Rhiannon's sister asked me what I was doing. When I told her that I was baking for Brandon, her eyes widened and she asked

me if Megan knew about this. This is when I started to wonder why I didn't know about Megan. We fought about it, but because I wasn't his real girlfriend I let the whole issue go and I tried to get used to sneaking around behind Meg's back. It isn't too hard to avoid her on vacations during the year, the summer is the tricky part. From what I heard through the grapevine, Brandon had been telling Meg that I was bothering him and there was nothing going on between us. I guess that story was blown when she stopped by his house unexpectedly the other day and my car with my college sticker was parked outside. Not only that, but we had just gotten back from the beach and I had borrowed his St. Lawrence sweatshirt, and was wearing it when she walked in. Not that I really cared too much what she thought of me, but I knew Brandon would have to do some pretty heavy story-telling to get himself out of that one.

Anyhow, about yesterday. My friend Lee and I had decided to go shopping at this mall that is probably two hours from where we live. We decided this mostly because we both are sick of running into people that we knew in high school and pretended to like. When you run into those people now, all you want to do is hit them but you can't, so you ask how school is going and put on your fakest smile hoping they will see someone else to go bother. Homecoming is even worse, that's why I don't ever go anymore. So off Lee and I went to this mall to go try and find something to run our credit card bills up on.

When Lee picked me up, she immediately noticed that I was wearing Brandon's St. Lawrence sweatshirt. I usually don't wear it at home for fear that I will run into Brandon and he will remember that I have it and ask for it back, or worse yet (for him anyway) run into Meg. But I figured that neither would happen on that particular day, so I put it on. Also, I guess I should admit that when I wear it I can kinda pretend that I really am Brandon's girlfriend cause I have his sweatshirt and everything. Sometimes I pretend too much and I start to believe it, and here's where the trouble came in.

Lee and I had split up for an hour in the mall, because she wanted to go look at shoes and I wanted to go price scarves in Jordan Marsh. Anyway, I had found this really nice silk one that I liked a ton, but it was forty bucks, and I had already bought two Pixies CD's and a Bob Mould tape for Brandon. I finally decided to get it so I got in this enormous line behind the only register that was open in that department. I waited for like five minutes, when the lady in front of me in line turned around and said, "This is ridiculous, waiting for a half hour just to buy a pair of thirty-dollar pants."

"Yeah," I agreed, not really wanting to talk to this dumb lady in front of me. I was too impatient to wait in line all day, and I hate talking to strangers.

"Do you go to St. Lawrence?" the woman asked, knocking me out of my thoughts.

"Uh-Uh," I answered. Then suddenly I found myself adding: "My boyfriend does."

The woman's face lit up. "Really? My niece's boyfriend goes there too. What does your boyfriend major in?" she asked, obviously becoming very interested in the conversation.

I decided to play the whole thing out. Why not, I thought, I was just stuck in line with nothing better to do. "He is a Philosophy major, minoring in English."

"I think my niece's boyfriend is majoring in that too, although I am not too sure. Philosophy is a popular major there from what I have heard. Where are you from?"

"North Shore," I answered without thinking too much about it, "up around Gloucester." Right about then I had lost interest in the conversation, and was wondering if I should forget about the scarf; I was late meeting Lee.

"Oh. . .," said the woman. She began to have a perplexed look on her face, which I attributed to the long wait in line for her ugly pair of gabardine pants. "What is your boyfriend's name?" she asked cautiously.

By this time I was completely fed up with the whole situation, and I just blurted out, "Brandon Wells."

I glanced at the woman just in time to catch her reaction, and then it hit me. My face turned about fifty shades of red, and I couldn't figure out who was going to kill me first: Brandon, or this woman. "You must be Anna," she said, obviously not pleased to be meeting me. "I am Megan's aunt."

Thanks for the introduction, I thought as I tried to stammer an excuse of why I had to go. I put the scarf down on a nearby table and went to go find Lee, wondering how I was going to explain this to everyone.

By the time I met up with Lee again, I was pretty damned upset. I mean, I knew there was no way that I could get out of this one even if I thought up some excellent excuses. How could I expect Brandon to understand something that I didn't quite understand myself? Lee told me not to worry about it, and brought up the fact that he had done some pretty lousy stuff to me before, but that didn't help much.

"Anna, look at it this way," Lee said as we were leaving the mall. "Brandon never talks to you much anyway. You always call him, and you never see him unless Megan is away and he's well. . . I don't see why you do this to yourself. I know he's really nice looking and all, but sometimes you've just gotta draw the line."

"Yeah, it's easy to draw lines in your mind, but the minute you actually try to stick by them you wonder why you drew them up in the first place." This was my feeble attempt to try to explain to Lee why I was sleeping with a guy who had absolutely no regard for my feelings. It was true, he didn't call unless he wanted something, and the only reason that I put up with it is because he's so gorgeous. Seriously. I can go over to his house and swear all up and down that I am not going to let him get

to me, but the second that he looks at me with his big brown eyes. . . I know that sounds lame, but he's really exotic looking--his mother is Russian, so he is dark and has black hair. Not to mention that his family is loaded, so put all of that on top of the fact that he drives a brand new Acura, and you've got what I am up against every time I see him.

The whole way home from the mall, I thought about ways that I could get out of the stunt that I pulled, and came to the conclusion that I was definitely in big trouble. Things wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't really screwed up at the beginning of the year.

Brandon gets a ride back and forth to St. Lawrence from Megan so they can share the driving, because she goes to school near him. On the way home for break last Christmas, before they started dating, Megan suggested that they should stop for the night because she was tired. I can just see her now--yawning with her hand over her big mouth while conveniently pulling into the nearest motel that was, I should add, a mere four hours from where we live. How obvious.

I should also probably say that I have never liked Megan much. We went to the same high school for two years before she left to go to private school. She managed to break three of my fingers during field hockey practice because we played the same position and she wanted to start that particular game.

Anyway, they stopped at the motel and she managed to get Brandon drunk, and then she seduced him. I can picture her lying there in bed with him, the room littered with beer cans, and she's got a big triumphant smile on her face. That's the image that I kept in my mind when I decided that I would have the last laugh.

See, my friend Lee is great friends with Megan's older brother. So, I strategically told Lee the whole motel story knowing she wouldn't be able to resist telling Megan's brother. It worked, because within three days Lee had told Megan's brother, he had told their mother, and I just sat back and laughed. I never dreamed that it would get back to their mother, I thought that he might just beat the crap out of Brandon or something. For a while I thought that this was an even better ending than the one I had planned out, but only because I forgot that Megan would want to find out who was at the bottom of it.

I was still basking in the glory of my revenge when Brandon called and shot me down. Apparently Lee had used the information I had given her as a base for telling Megan's brother the most unbelievable stories about Megan. This wouldn't have been so bad had Lee remembered to tell him where my story ended and hers began. Suddenly I was held responsible for something Lee had heard about Brandon's father using cocaine, which is something the whole town knows but just doesn't talk about. (Brandon's father is a lawyer.) So, I managed to get out of that predicament with some

heavy explaining, but I always had the feeling after that, that Brandon didn't exactly trust me too much.

Well, this is where I was left; knowing that Brandon was pretty fed up with my previous antics, and this latest game with Megan's aunt was really going to push him over the edge. The funny thing was, is that I had begun to think about what Lee had said about drawing lines. I thought about Brandon coming at me all purple-faced and screaming, and suddenly the absurdity of the whole relationship hit me. Unfortunately I don't think it hit me hard enough, because not soon after I thought about Brandon going off on me, I was back to sulking about the possibility that he may never speak to me again. I don't know why that seemed to upset me so much, it just did.

I have gotten really hyper-sensitive about him in the last two years, and I think that was just around the first time that I slept with him. It wasn't one of those things that I really planned to do--it just kinda happened. We were both drunk. But after that it kept happening, mostly on vacations and stuff, and I started to notice that the more it happened the worse our friendship got until lately where we weren't even talking anymore. We would just hang out, watch a movie and drink beer, and then the next thing I knew he'd be putting the moves on me. I never really asked too many questions about our relationship, because I knew he was with Megan. I think I just figured that he must like me at least a little, cause he was cheating on Meg with me. I know that's really dumb, but I guess it just goes to show you what you can talk yourself into when the truth is such a mess that you don't want to deal with it anymore.

After I had talked to Lee for a good long time and we had rationalized through every possible excuse I could give myself for backing down, I half-heartedly decided to go talk to Brandon. I always let her talk me into doing things that I don't feel like doing, but I guess this time she was right. I knew that she was right the whole way over to his house, but that didn't change the fact that all I wanted to do was puke because I was so nervous. Either that, or turn my car around, get into bed, wait for Brandon to call and try to deny the entire mess. Maybe I could've even denied that I ever knew him at all. Anyway, by the time I got to his house my hands were shaking so badly that I didn't want to take them out of the pockets of my shorts, so I kicked the bottom of the door with my foot instead of knocking.

I got all happy when his sister answered the door, because I hastily jumped to the conclusion that Brandon just might not be home after all. Unfortunately she looked at me strangely, opened the door wider so that I could come in, and told me that he was up in his room and I could just go on up. Nice talking to ya, I thought as I raced their dog Ben up the narrow wooden stairway, practically killing myself because Ben is a huge German shepherd who likes to play but forgets that he weighs a ton. Sometimes I think that I have a

better relationship with Ben that I do with Brandon. I didn't even get a chance to knock on Brandon's door, because Ben got a little carried away and jumped on me right as I made it to the top of the stairs. This sent me sprawling through the door to land in the middle of his floor, on top of the backpack I had with me, with Ben landing on top of me. For a minute I forgot why I was there, and I wasn't having fits of nervousness anymore until I looked up and saw Brandon and Megan sitting on Brandon's bed staring at me.

"Hey. . .," I said, smiling nervously while trying to give the dog the hint that play time was over.

"Uh, hi Anna," Brandon squeezed out in his "you'd better have a damned good explanation for this one" tone.

"Hey," I absent-mindedly repeated, flashing Ben a quick smile. I sent him some telepathic messages to bite Megan in the leg, but I think he hates her as much as I do, so he just got up and walked out of the room.

"Well, I think I ought to go now," Megan said not too convincingly. I think she wanted me to leave. She grabbed her pocketbook off of Brandon's floor (it was lying at me feet, which made me want to laugh for some reason), and left without saying anything to me. Brandon went to walk her out, and I took a seat on the other bed near the window so I could avoid looking at him during the rest of the time I was there.

He finally came back upstairs after quite awhile; I could hear him through the open window trying to explain what he didn't even know to Megan, then bawling his sister out for letting me in when she knew Meg was there. For some reason I hadn't thought of that before, but it made me wonder what she was up to. Brandon's sister was always getting me into trouble when we were younger. Once when Brandon and I were in sixth grade, and she was in fourth, we were playing at their house and she kept making me laugh when we were drinking hot chocolate, and it finally came out my nose and I made a big stain on the oriental rug. It was always like that with their family, so I should've known that something was up.

Anyhow, by the time he made it upstairs he was really pissed off. The second he got into his room, it was exactly like I had pictured it: his face was all red and he was screaming his head off at me already.

"Goddamnit Anna, I told you this just wasn't going to work out. 'But Brandon. . .' you're always whining, 'I really didn't mean to.' Well it won't work this time. Shit. I have had it with you--get out."

"I didn't come here to apologize Brandon, believe it or not. I have had enough. . ."

"Had enough of what, Anna? Lying to yourself? To everyone else? God, you are so dumb."

This is when the whole thing really hit me. He was right, I was dumb. Well for not listening to Lee sooner, at least. I sat there for a few minutes and stared

at Brandon. I must have had a pretty stupid expression on my face, because I could tell he was waiting for me to give in like usual. But there was just no way in hell I was going to give into that bastard.

"Brandon?" I whispered.

"What," he said flatly, still pretty angry.

"You're an asshole." I said it. No smiles, no tears, no apology. I said it, grabbed his St. Lawrence sweatshirt from out of my backpack and I threw it at him. Then I walked out before I could give myself a chance to screw it up. I calmly got into my car, drove to Lee's house, and cried for three hours. But I haven't called Brandon, and I'd bet my right arm that he won't call me. Well, unless Megan breaks up with him. . .



Fracture
Cris Geer
Oils

Two Nights

by Jeff Hill

"Is this, baby, what you were born to feel, and do, and be?"

--K. Fearing

So the first night we danced, mostly, and drank,
The bottles grew on the table, all night,
And we shifted and turned in the lamplight,
Laughing that we were still awake.
In the cold dawn we went out to buy cigarettes,
Disheveled, indifferent
To the staring eyes, scraping up change with shaky hands,
And then we returned,
And put some Neil Young on the turntable.
(*helpless, helpless, helpless. . .*)
We shared another bottle in the afternoon,
Laughing when we spilled some,
Analyzing the stains on the carpet,
Delighted in our decadence.
At six we watched the news, the headline story: A man accused
Of torture and rape.
I said, that's a nasty habit, and she slapped me,
But still she laughed,
And she called the charges redundant.
After that we played cards in front of the television,
Gin mostly, and drank some more,
Until she fell asleep there,
On the floor among the ashtrays and bottles,
And I carried her to bed.
We woke again in the afternoon,
Shared the last cigarette,
Picked up some broken glass, and
As the day grew older, we grew silent,
And avoided each other's eyes.



Body Bag McGee

by Jeffrey Bardzell

I

You never really notice these things until afterward.
The car I was driving was always red.
The whole thing seemed appropriate for a sit-com.
You ask why do these things always happen to me?

Like when I was driving in that Dodge Dart--
With no air conditioner on a misguided early-spring day--
I was sweating like one of those women on *Twenty-Minute Workout*.
And driving down a shade-mottled street with children playing.

I saw a child. Maybe she was four years old, innocent
And expressionless. She didn't really have blond hair
Or blue eyes, but nevermind. She had gravity. She was
Unaware of that old dirty Dart rolling down her boiling street.

I watched her. My unconscious mind switched into automatic.
Then her eyes gently looked at me and said timidly, "Don't!"
Preoccupied with the odd warning I didn't know what was
Happening. The car bumped into the air, and I was slowing down.

The kids ran into the street behind me, dawning horror working
Unformed shaded expressions on their shining faces. A broken
Fur ball rolled in the center of the uncomprehending crowd.
The girl stared unmoving at the lifeless lump of her tabby.

II

The snow is mostly melted; patches of street are still slick.
Clumps of caked sand still stick to the side of the street.
You know you just passed a speed limit sign, because you see it
Fading in the rearview. You wish you had seen the front.

You drive 40 as you scan the road ahead for cops.
You somehow expect to see Ponch and Jon pull you over.
An uneven marshmallow coating of snow sticks melted to a hill.
The mud beneath it is a thick, molten brown.

You follow a long thin fallen tree up the hill with your eyes.
The Sun's fire seems so far away--black jet falling (the SR-71
You saw on *A Current Affair*)--you blink your eyes; it stops
Your heart. You hit the brakes get out and say "What the Hell?"

Caught in the grill spreads the broken form
Of a crow. You start to feel sorry for it and suddenly stop:
The bird is alive!
In horror you can't touch it. You back away and drive onward.

III

I'll be driving in the countryside with waves of pastures
Surrounding mountains. Perhaps I'll be driving 65 because I
Just passed some farmer in a rusted red, late-sixties

Pick-up truck like the one on *Sanford and Son*.

I'll have passed him by; the road'll be all to myself.
Perhaps I'll yawn and try to find a better station because
This one sounds like the haunting T.V. that the little girl is
Watching on *Pottergeist*--she looks so much like my sister did.

I'll look down and change the station and turn the Bass/Treble
Knob. The song'll have energy, early Who or something, and I
Look up and there'll be a silver possum looking at me and wondering
What I'm doing in its road as I wonder how I managed to hit it so damn fast.

"Body Bag McGee" your friends call you. It's not
Terribly fair, well. . . anyway, you're not quite as squeamish
Now: you don't leave them in your grill or anything.
Neatly folded in the trunk rest a plastic bag and latex gloves.



Balsa I

Stacey L. Scott
Balsa wood



Untitled
Steve Lewis
Photograph

Untitled 100
by Wynn Yarbrough

What angel do we have here.
In green and black, she leaves
the moon behind.
I've seen her before,
not in a nightmare
or a dream. Maybe it was
highway hypnosis? On the road,
who can tell?

But, tonight, I couldn't be hers. She'd seen me too late. My wife had beaten her with a phone call. This chess is subtle, confusing. The queen had my heart, but the pawn--the pawn was present.

She strolled up to me,
almost purring like a cat.
As she started talking
to me, I looked
into her ancient eyes.
All I could see was
a stopwatch. The meter
was running on this cab.
I shuddered,
lit a cigarette, the smoke
almost blowing her away.
I wasn't in the mood
to make a donation
to this men's club.

Revealed

Jessica MacKenzie

October 21, 1964--
I was sixteen when
my father
cut it down;
branches sprawling
orange and yellow
all over the back yard.
I woke to the sound
of sawing,
wood chips invading
my sleepy thoughts.
I bolted to the window
just in time to see
my father
find my secret hiding place
in the trunk
of the rotting tree.

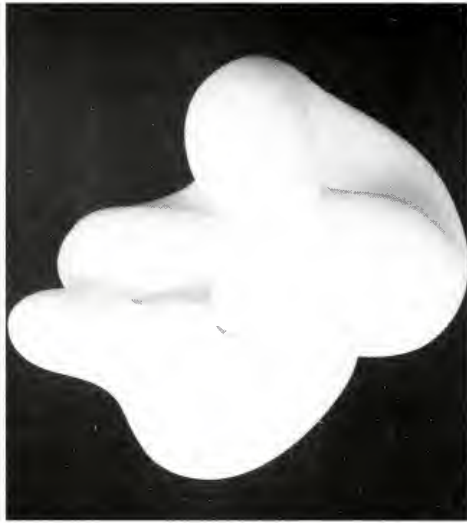
I had found the hole
when I was seven
and had kept
things in it
in a small, gray metal box
ever since:
my red Swiss army knife that
my mother
wouldn't allow
in the house,
a map of the neighborhood
divided into zones
that we used for

playing war,
and sometimes
even my allowance.
Later on
I put more important things
in my hiding place:
pictures out of magazines
I didn't want my mother to find,
and in the tenth grade
I added the letters from Joanna.

She was my first
real girlfriend,
and I was slightly
embarrassed about it,
although I don't remember
why now.
I did not
even care that
my father
saw the pictures, scattered among
the leaves
as the open box clanged
to the ground.
All I could do
was watch as he
read the letter
that fell
at his feet,
then smiled
up at my window.



Illlclt WanderlIngS
Mindy Culver
Pinhole Photograph



Salt Block I
Diana Faris
Salt Block

The Smell of Miss Mack
by Lissa Brannon

Years ago it was camelias.
They unfolded across her yard; the scent
clung like linen to her smooth skin,
clung to anyone who passed.
On thick hot days it pressed
fresh and cool against you
like a wind-whipped sheet on clothesline.
Miss Mack was always cool, even indoors.
Around town we waited for a hint
of her queenly smile, or the clean blue
smell of her camelias, riding the wind.

Now, on Tuesdays I stop by with bread
and a carton of milk, and I try not to breathe.
Without the puckish tumble of blossoms
the yard is brown and bitter as coffee grounds.
She prefers to sit inside, though the air conditioner
we once envied is as dead as flowers.
Perhaps through the years she inspired
enough camelia to fill her nose forever,
for she doesn't seem to notice
the sour-sponge taint of mildew
in a close room,
or the hot reek of urine,
or her own sweat.
She holds out a cloudy glass of tea, beams
benevolently as she used to when offering
fat blooms plucked for our hair,
and I sip quickly.



Heating Plant Swans
Diana Faris
Photograph

Sylvia and Edmond Solomon

by Deborah L. Sullivan

Their farm in Middletown, New York
Was far away from Queens
Where they grew up on Yiddish proverbs:
"Sleep faster, we need the pillows."

You take me to their farm
And we mill about the cattle which all have names.
The swayback horse, whose color has
Faded in this picture, eats chunks of the salt lick.
You count his ribs and remember the beatings
From his old trash collecting owner.

You take my hand and lead me
To watch Grandma Sylvia
Throw fists of feed at the ravenous
Lot of hens who peck instead the
Headless run around
Until it goes limp in its feathers.

Sylvia wears her only warm coat--
Fox fur--and the seed has
Beaded the leather of her heels.
The shoes add inches to her frame of five feet,
And she never takes them off.

Grandpa Edmond is in the bull pen
As you watch him trying to make amends
With a beefy character who has lost his horns to Edmond.
You sigh and tell me the bull never forgave him.
I take your hand and ask you if we can go inside.

The kitchen is warm with the cooking of
Latkis and knishes and you are noshe
For the taste of them.
At the oval oak table
Edmond pours the green and silver
Goo into the minnow mold.

He tells the kid you still are
About when his membership
In the Rod and Rifle Club may have saved his life.
From 300 yards he took aim and shot the
Spine out of the gopher whose earthly
Home could have caved in under his tractor tire
And maybe even killed him.

You tell me they sold the farm
Because Grandpa had a stroke
And couldn't lift as well anymore.
You show me Edmond, back in Queens,
Sitting on the porch, his legs
Crossed in a lawn chair,
And the cigarette smoke curling past
His serious eyebrows that could be yours.



After the Storm
Steven Lewis
Photograph



Figure Study
Vittorio Colaizzi
Oil on masonite

from **Nine Fool Songs**
by Dan Dervin

V

Being so handy, good husbands and fathers
Are always in demand, being so handy
To have around; while men are not so dandy
When they're randy; they mess you up
When they mess around. And fools make it worse
With their handy-dandy that mocks a husband
Who knows he's hands-on by keeping hands-off;

But even fools know a man is like a woman,
One is just as dangerous as the other,
And when you put them both together
It looks like an end to fooling.

There's one foolhardy man I know
Seeking early retirement
From a twenty-year wedlock--
Who won't get away so soon--
They'll haul him onto another lot
And scrawl, "One Marriage Owner,
Easy Terms, Low Mileage" or whisper,
"Look real close and you'll see
The thing's barely broken in--
Good at least for twenty more."

Patrons

The *Aubade* staff thanks the following patrons comprised of both merchants from the downtown area of Fredericksburg and individuals. Their contributions allowed the *Aubade* to print fifty percent more copies to meet demand and helped us upgrade the quality of the paper.

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Christmas in Fredericksburg

Christmases Past and Presents

Collectvs Books

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